Bida-Its Meaning, Aspects, Dangers, And The Solution

An anonymous contribution based on Sh. Jamal Zarabozo's lecture

The religion of Islam, the religion of Muslims, is based on only one teaching. In other words there is only one 'true' Islam. There is no such thing as different versions of Islam or different types or classes of this deen. The true path is only one way which lies under the shade of the Quran, the Sunnah and the understanding of the Companions.

As was illustrated by our beloved Prophet (Saw) and was narrated by Ibn Mas'ud that one day Prophet (saw) drew a straight line on the ground and He said, " This is the path of Allah." Then he drew some lines to the left and right to it and said, "These are the erred paths and on each of these paths, there is Satan calling to it." Then he recited the following verse from the Quran (which means):

"Verily, this is my straight path so follow it and do not follow the other path that will take you away from the true path."

In fact, if we look in the Quran, when Allah (swt) describes the truth, it is always described as singular. For example, the word 'al-noor' which is singular is used for the truth, as opposed to 'zulumath' which is plural. It is a prime example from the Quran the clearly shows us that the right way is one way only. Any deviation from the true path is not an acceptable 'branch' of Islam but as the scholars call it, is a 'bida'.

Unfortunately, due to several reasons, the concept of Bida is not as clear to everyone as it should be. A reason for that is a lot of people are confused about 'good' bida or **bida-e-hasana.**

Secondly, there are many things which we do now that were not done at the time of Prophet (saw). With the outset of such widespread bida, people are confused, and rightly so, as to what is actually sunnah and what in religion is not sunnah- i.e. bida.

These misconceptions call for the need to establish the fundamental step which is to know bida, the concepts of bida according to Ahl-Sunnah Wal Jamah and the aspects of bida.

Bida, its Meaning: (heresy, innovation)

"Any invented act or path in the religion that is made to compete or resemble the Shari'a and that is followed for the same purpose as Shari'a is supposed to be followed."

From this definition and from the statements of Prophet (saw) about bida or innovation, we can come up with some general ideas or concepts about bida that explains this definition.

Aspects of Bida:

Some of the aspects or concepts of bida are as follow:

1. Every bida is Dalalah.

Linguistically bida is something which is new or something which was not done before, i.e., it has no precedent. From the point of view of Shari'a, every bida is Dalalah and there is no such thing as 'good' bida. Prophet (saw) said in an hadith, "**Kullo** dalalatin fin naar (every dalalah is in hellfire)."

Dalalah means to be astray or to be away form the truth. If we look in the Quran, we will see how Allah (swt) used the word 'dalalah' or 'dal'. It is not used for the one who commits a sin or makes a mistake with respect to the deen but it is used for those people who have gone astray form the straight path or who have divided the religion. For instance in Surah Fatiha (first chapter), the word 'Daaleen' is not used for mere sinners but it is used for people who have gone astray form the true path, the Christians.

So when Prophet (saw) described bida, he used the harsher form of deviation, i.e. dalalah, as he said, " **Kullo bidatin dalalah** (every bida is dalalah)." He didn't just say that every bida is a sin or is wrong but in fact it is something much greater than that. It is a misguidance, something that takes us AWAY from the right path.

2. Bida is performed as a way of pleasing and getting closer to Allah (swt).

In other words, when someone follows a bida, he claims that by doing this he will be closer to Allah (swt). This is much different from committing a sin. As Ahmad Ibn Hanbal once said, "The greatest sinner (fasiq) from the Ahl-Sunnah Wal Jamah is better than the most pious person from Ahl-Bida."

The sinner, at least, knows that whatever he is doing is wrong and doesn't claim that it's halal and should be done to please Allah (swt) and so on. However, the one who commits bida not only goes against Quran and Sunnah but also claims that what he does is pleasing to Allah (swt) and a way of getting closer to Him. And this is one of the greatest lies one can commit to say that some act is pleasing to Allah and has no proof from Allah (swt) about his claim.

So part of the concept of bida is that one who commits it claims that it is approved by the religion and Shari'a and it is beloved to Allah (swt). This is also one of the dividing points between what is bida and what is not.

3. Bida can be both in inventing new actions or in shunning an action.

Meaning, when someone originates a new practice saying that it is approved by Shari'a without a proof is bida. In the same way, when someone avoids something claiming that by avoiding such and such practice he is pleasing Allah and has no proof for it form Quran or Sunnah is also bida.

For example, during Prophet (saw)'s time three people came to the Prophet offering their types of 'bidas'. One claimed that he will pray the whole night, every night for the rest of his life. One claimed that he will fast every day in the future and the third one said that he will never marry. The Prophet was swift in his disapproval of these "good" bidas (at the outset, one would think how could anything be wrong with worshipping Allah all the time). The Prophet told these people that he was the best among all mankind and the he prayed some part of the night and slept another part, that he fasted some days while did not in others and that he was married. While the first two wanted to increase their worship beyond what Shari'a requires, the third person intended to avoid marriage or shun or elude something which is totally legal in Shari'a and approved by Allah (swt). Like the Christian monks and

priests and the 'Muslim' Sufis claim that by not marrying they are pleasing Allah (swt) is bida and against Islam. Or if a vegetarian claims that by not harming a living soul he is pleasing Allah is also bida because Allah has allowed it and made it halal for us to eat the meat of animals(of course, only the animals He has made halal).

4. Anything in Shari'a can have a bida created or related to it. Shari'a comprises aqeeda, beliefs, acts of worship and business or public dealings (mu'amlaat). So, bida is not just in matters of aqeeda or acts of worship but it could also be in business or public dealings. For example, if a person claims that 4 witnesses are required for business deal rather than the 2 that are instituted by Islam then he or she is exceeding the limits of Shari'a and falling into bida.

5. Bida has no source and or evidence in Quran, Sunnah of Prophet (Saw) and in the actions or Ijma (agreement) of Sahabas. One famous example that is quoted by the Ahl-Bida in their desire to make some forms of bida halal, is the example of Umar (ra) and the tarawih prayers. They claim that since Umar (ra) started daily tarawih prayers in ramadhan while the Prophet (saw) only performed 3 nights, and Umar (ra) said that he started a good 'bida', we can accept the concept of bida. However, this is a failure to distinguish the linguistic meaning of bida from its Shari'a meaning. For instance Allah refers in the Quran to his Sunnah. Obviously when one refers to sunnah, it is a reference to the Prophet's sunnah and its Shari'a aspects. Similarly when Umar (ra) referred to the regular tarawih prayers, he was only referring to the linguistic meaning. The proof for this claim is clear. Tarawih prayers were not some new practice in religion. The Prophet (saw) instituted the tarawih prayers. The only reason that he stopped after 3 nights was clarified in his own saying that he did not wish that the tarawih prayers be made obligatory upon the Muslims. However, at the Prophet's death, the message of Islam had been perfected and tarawih prayers would always be recommended and not mandatory. Thus, Umar (ra) only started the practice of regularly performing a sunnah not STARTING a sunnah.

To conclude this section of the article, it must be understood that bida is not only a new invention in the religion claimed to be pleasing to Allah (swt), but the one who creates and the one who follows bida actually assert that there is some shortcoming in the deen. In reality, they are stating that there is some way to get closer to Allah (swt) and to please Him that is not found in the Quran or the Sunnah of Prophet (saw). That they have found a way to believe or act and to worship Allah that is pleasing to Him and which is BETTER than the way of Prophet (saw). That this perfect deen of Islam is missing something in it and that is why they are adding something to it or this deen had too much in it and that is why they are taking somethings away. This, in essence, is bida - the concept of a not-so-wholesome deen.

It is an (Naudhobillah) insult to Allah (swt) to say that He could not reveal or teach Prophet(saw) the best way and so they had to find the best way on their own. It is also a denial to what Allah (swt) Himself said in the Quran:

"Today, I have completed and perfected your religion for you and chose Islam for you as your deen" (5:3)

It is also a denial to what Prophet (saw) said:

"There is nothing that shall take you closer to Allah (swt) than what He has told you to do and nothing will take you away than what He has prohibited."

Hence, we must hate bida. This is the bottom-line. This hatred is one of the aspects of our love for

Allah and the Prophet (saw) and love for a deen that we know is perfect and will always remain so.

Dangers of Bida:

Shaikh Mohammed Sharoot wrote in his book on bida that if the dangers of bida were restricted simply to the person who follows it, then maybe we would not get as upset or as worried as we are now, but in fact, the dangers of bida and the harms and evils of bida spread from the person following it to the people he is around and finally to the entire Ummah. The deen as a whole is effected because of their heresy and innovations.

Here are some dangers of bida:

1. Bida causes disunity in the Ummah.

It is first and foremost because of Ahl-Bida that there is division and fractionalization among this Ummah. This is proven very clearly from history. All of the Sahabas were following the way of Prophet (saw). They all loved and cared for each other even when they had a difference of Ijtihad after Uthman (ra). They fought with Ali (ra) and Mua'wiya (ra) against each other but they would still take hadith from each other, pray together and marry their daughters to each other. Their fight was due to their difference of Ijtihad but their love was still for the sake of Allah and they were still united on the way of Prophet (saw). However, when the Khawarij brought out their ideas during the famous battle of camel between Muwayiah and Ali (ra on both), many Muslims split from the ranks of the Ahl-Sunnah and hence became the first of the Ahl-bida (the people of bida). It is interesting to note that not even ONE sahaba was present among the Khawarij which in itself speaks of many volumes.

Hence, when it comes to Ahl-Bida, the situation becomes totally different. The Ummah split because of Ahl-Bida. When they bring their new ideas and acts of worship to the religion, the one group that is always supposed to be sticking to the truth (as Prophet had mentioned) i.e. the Ahl-Sunnah, reject these heretic ideas. They refuse to accept Ahl-Bida's concepts and methodology.

The general statement made by various 'scholars' of today, "We all should over come our differences and be united and fight with Kuffar", is a nice statement as a theory. However, practically it is not acceptable because we can not be united with people who do not agree with all tenants of Quran and Sunnah. It is our duty to oppose people when we see them following bida once the evidence has been established.

2. Bida is the cause of fitna (test or trials) or severe punishment for this Ummah. By definition the people of bida are refusing to follow the commands and orders of Prophet (saw). Allah (swt) says in the Quran:

"For those people who are differing from the commands of Prophet, there will come to them either a fitna (test or trial from Allah) or a severe punishment."

Once Imam Malik was asked about putting on the Ahram from the Prophet's mosque rather than the miqaad. He said, "I fear for that person that some fitna will come to him." The man said, "Why? I am just adding a little to the boundaries of Ahram." Since by doing so, he was going against the commands of Prophet (saw), Imam Malik recited the above verse from the Quran.

3. Bida is the source of fasad (evils) in the Ummah

If we look at the Shari'a (laws of the Quran and Sunnah), it was meant for the well-being of mankind in this world and in hereafter. Anytime we go astray from the true teachings and accept any law other than the laws of Quran and Sunnah then we miss that well-being (maslaha) and replace it with fasad. By bringing new methodologies or concepts, the Ahl-Bida actually change the way that will bring the most happiness in here and in hereafter to a way that will not bring the 'maslaha' (well-being).

4. Bida cause Sunnah to die and creates hatred for Sunnah.

Whenever people introduce any bida it usually replaces some Sunnah. Or people add to Sunnah to the point where Sunnah is not practiced correctly anymore.

Ibn Abbas said, "When bida is created then the Sunnah dies and this continues until that bida is living and the Sunnah is dead."

Hasan Ibn Attiya, one of the Ta'baeen said, "When the people accept the bida, Allah removes the Sunnah from among them and doesn't return it until the day of judgment."

So, not only does bida cause the Sunnah to die but at the same time it causes hatred for the Sunnah. Ahl-Bida not only refuses to accept the actual Sunnah but also avoid going to the masjid or places where Sunnah is practiced. For instance, they show great disdain at Muslims that pray with their shoes on while this is an established Sunnah. It is common to see these Ahl-Bida going at great lengths to describe the filth that shoes carry and it would not be 'right' to pray wearing them. Why do these same people forget that it is not 'right' to make a decision on the religion of Allah, the sole owner of this deen? Allah knows what is beneath our shoes or what was beneath the sahabas' shoes or the Prophet's (saw) shoes but he still allowed it and as Muslims, we are to hear and obey (as the Quran instructs us) and not to pass judgments. That is what happens when the bida spreads. Much hatred is created for the Sunnah that it gets hard for people to follow Sunnah. They get continuous pressure to change their ways. And even if there are some people who truly want to follow the Sunnah, Ahl-bida confuse them so much and mix the lies with truth so much so that they get totally puzzled by Ahl-bida's arguments and end up following the bida. They get pulled into bida and they are not able to see the truth anymore, although they were sincere to Allah (swt). So, InshaAllah, Allah will judge them according to their intentions but we know well that actions that are not within the fold of Quran and Sunnah are unacceptable irrespective of the intentions behind them.

5. Bida is a stepping stone to Kufr.

One of the early scholars, Al-Barbahaaree, one of the companions of Ahmed Ibn Hanbal, said, "Beware of bida, because every bida started out at something small and resembling the truth and people were fooled by it and followed it until it became bigger and bigger and were trapped by it and it took them out of Islam."

Ibn Taymiyyah has a nice passage in one of his books showing that:

"In fact, the kufr of Jews and Christians is because of bida. They introduced new things into the religion and those things took them completely away from the true message of Musa (Moses) and Isa (Jesus) Alaihumma Salam".

6. For the Ummah as a whole, bida hurts the spreading of Islam and Dawah for the sake of Allah. One of the easiest ways is that usually the ideas of Ahl-bida are used by the enemies of Islam to portray

Islam. Most times TV shows will portray Islam as Sufis making 'zikr' which in fact has nothing to do with Islam. They are setting these things up to make people run away from Islam because belief of Ahl-bida is not from the 'fitra'. Only 'real' Islam contains the fitra and people will not be attracted to something which goes against the fitra. For instance, the group of Farakkhan, the nation of Islam being portrayed by Kuffars as an 'Islamic' group. Someone who is looking for the 'truth' will never be attracted to their ideas and beliefs which are being spread in the name of Islam.

7. Individually, bida destroys the akhira of the person. The best example is like the termite being allowed to live in wood. Imagine bida is the termite and the person is the wood. Sooner or later the person will be ruined because it is clearly shown by the several hadith of Prophet (saw). Bida will be rejected in the hellfire. Allah (swt) puts a barrier between the person committing bida and repentance. This person and his supporters are cursed by Allah and the angels. He will be turned away from the fountain of Prophet (saw) on the day of judgment. His deeds will be rejected as long as he commits the bida. He will be thinking in the world that he is doing something pleasing to Allah, whereas, in hereafter, he will find out that there is no benefit to what he did. He will not only bear the burden of his bida but also of anyone who followed him.

Solution to Avoid Bida:

First of all, the people claiming to follow the Sunnah and being from Ahl-Sunnah Wal Jamah have to realize the dangers of bida and how it is an obligation upon them to hate and oppose bida. For instance, if a group tries to oppose a bida, the first people to come and defend the bida are the ones who claim to be from Ahl-Sunnah. They say that they should not impose things and give people freedom of what they are doing and so on.

This is at best weird because when anything goes against Quran and Sunnah then there is no such thing as giving others freedom of doing what they want. This is basically, due to the lack of understanding of bida.

Secondly, we have to establish "Amara bil ma'roof wa naheen anil munkar (ordering good and forbidding evil)." Bida is a kind of high munkar (evil) and Prophet (saw) has clearly told us in a hadeeth that we should stop munkar with the best of our abilities.

Last but not least, we should educate ourselves about the 'real' Sunnah of Prophet (saw) and find out what is bida and what is not. We have to look at the tafseer (explanation) of the Quran as well as the hadith of the Prophet (saw). When understanding the verses of the Quran and the hadith of Prophet (saw) we have to take into consideration the context and the time of the revelation of the verse or the hadith of Prophet (saw).

For instance, many people misinterpret the hadith of the Prophet (saw) where he mentioned the reward of those who introduce a good practice in Islam, with introducing 'innovations' in Islam. However, if one reads the earlier portion of this Hadith in Muslim, it clarifies the misconception. Prophet (saw) said it when he saw some poor people sitting outside the mosque and no one helped them. He (saw) was unhappy and delivered a sermon reminding people to fear Allah (swt). After the speech someone brought a big load of charity and give it to those people. When others saw him doing so, they all started giving charity to those people until the expression of Prophet (saw)'s face changed form anger to happiness.

Basically, the man gave charity, which is an allowable and a good act from Shari'a. So, if someone

does an act which people have been neglecting, and is an allowable act and in accordance of Shari'a and people follow him then he gets his reward and reward for being followed without either one's reward being reduced. Hence, although, this constitutes the literal meaning of bida' hasana, it has no relation whatsoever to the shari'a meaning of bida. The same applies for an evil act.

May Allah protect us form committing bida and guide us all to the His path and help us in strengthening our faith. All the good is from Allah (saw) and His Messenger (saw) and all the evil is form me and shaitan.

[Back to Articles]